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Agnieszka Polska



Agnieszka Polska uses computer-generated media to focus on the individual and her social responsibility positioned in an intricate relationship between language, science and history. She attempts to describe the overwhelming ethical ambiguity of our time by poetic means; and the relationship between an individual and her surroundings by constantly shifting of the narrative through different scales. These melancholy journeys might depart from the laws of quantum mechanics, the female mouth, or an imperfect and fragile artifact, and soon reach the horror of catastrophes on a cosmic scale.

The protagonists of her animated videos and films are often historical artists - those who left art or discredited their own role as an artist, like Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske or Paweł Freisler. Polska's videos take a hallucinatory form, composed largely of found, digitally manipulated images. Many of her works examine various processes of influence, legitimization or exclusion in the fields of language, consciousness and history. In order to describe these processes, Polska deliberately uses visual and acoustic stimuli to affect the viewer's brain - in other words, that trigger a very physical feeling of being immersed in the material being watched.

Agnieszka Polska was born 1985 in Lublin, Poland. She lives and works in Krakow, PL, and Berlin, D.



THE NEW SUN
2017, photo, 70 x 70 cm



WHAT THE SUN HAS SEEN

HD animation, 2017, 7 min. 16 sec.

The film borrows its title from a poem by Polish poet of the realist/positivist style Maria Konopnicka (1842-1910). The poem "What the sun has seen" recounts in a childish style the quotidian, peaceful rural activities and happy family life of the nation in the countryside, as observed by the sun on its daily journey across the sky. Polska offers her own dark, ironic version of the poem, dealing with contamination by information (information waste) and the role of the "helpless observer" who, like the "Angel of History" in the well-known adage by Walter Benjamin, can only look at the debris piled by lived time without being able to intervene.



ASK THE SIREN

HD animation, 2017, 10 min. 25 sec.

Ask the Siren is a short film presenting the historical and cultural connotations of the figure of Mermaid in the context of Eastern European history. In a poetic fashion, film attempts to describe the Syren as a symbol representing Polish identity crisis, rooted in the annihilation of the pagan history during the Christian colonisation of the region in the 10th century. The filmic character presents itself as a being not able to be classified in any social or biological category. The work refers to Polish scholar Maria Janion's book *The Uncanny Slavdom*.



GLASS OF PETROL

UV print on polyester, dimensions variable, 2015.

"The photo-based collage work Glass of Petrol (2015), shows a pitch black background with a perfectly shaped champagne glass, fully centered, and taking over most of the image. The crystal glass itself is exceptionally clean allowing its mercurial and sensuously colored contents to come hypnotically through. The luxurious colors of the liquid — a mix of blue, purple, light yellow, and pinks—slightly remind us of images of the Earth as captured from space, yet they are also deceiving since we recognize from the work's title the dark fuel to which humanity is addicted." (from the text by Jovanna Venegas for 11th Gwangju Biennale catalogue)

Image: exhibition view, 11th Gwangju Biennale, 2016, photography by Doyun Kim



MY LITTLE PLANET

HD animation, 2016, 7 min. 10 sec.

This video presents an allegorical story of society, where time is being measured by the movements of daily-use objects rotating around the planet: a Malboro butt, bottle cap and sticking plaster. In the humorous plaster. In the humorous fashion, the narrator describes the conventionality and arbitrariness of norms implemented on society.

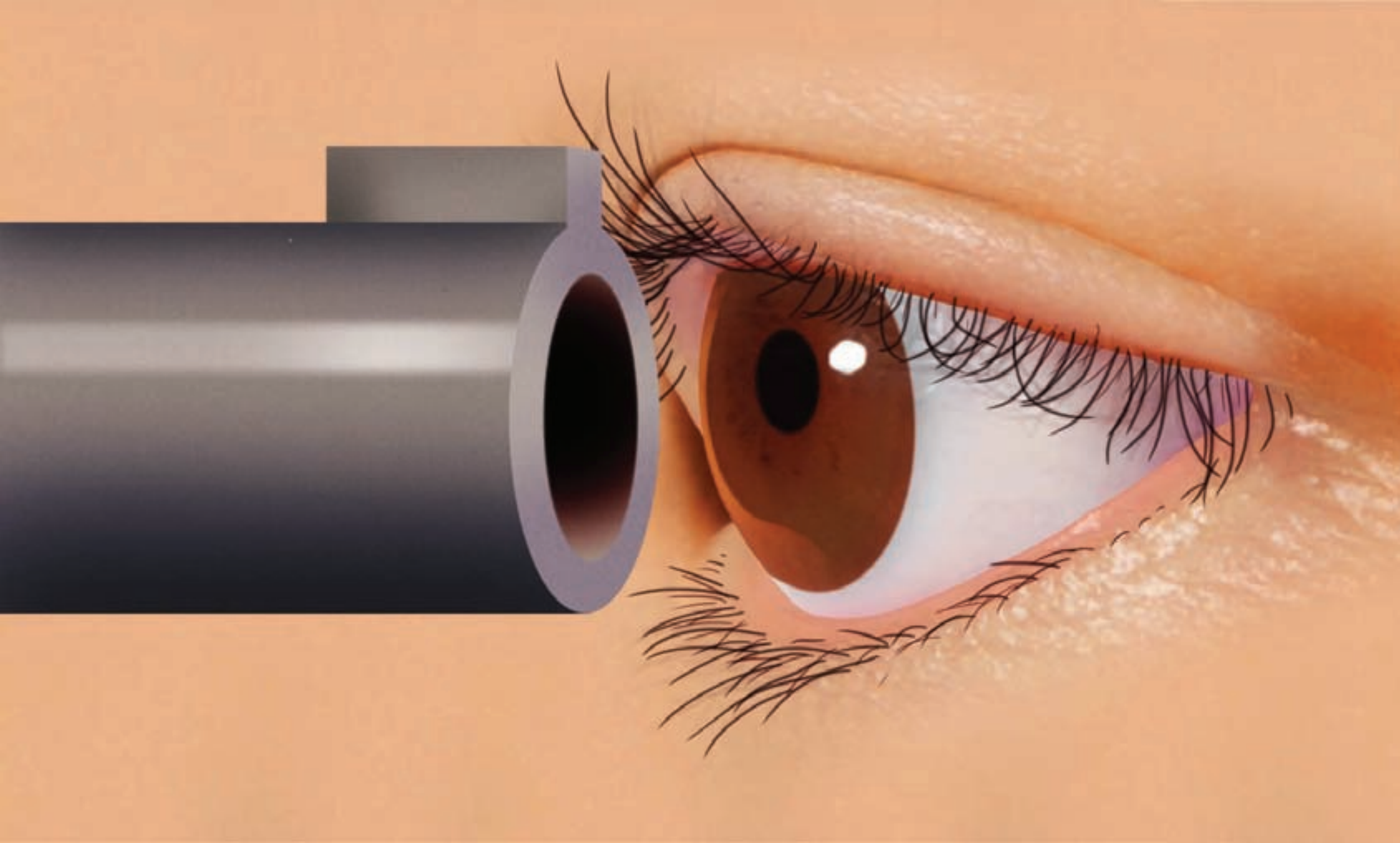


THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS

Video and sound installation, 2015, 9 min. 50 sec.

The Bearer of Bad News is a sound and video installation that incorporates the elusive qualities of human language freed from the human body. The work features a fully disembodied voice and a shadow moving in space - seemingly the elusive leftovers of an actor gone missing. The voice foretells a gloomy vision of the future and evokes the clash between "the pessimism of the intellect" and "the optimism of the will". The deep sadness of the invisible, gloomy messenger is in fact the programmed emotion of a machine.

image: exhibition view, Rijksakademie Open Studios, Amsterdam, 2015



THE LEISURE TIME OF A FIREARM
2016, Photography, 60 x 100 cm



FUTURE DAYS

2013, HD-video, 29 min. 30 sec.

The ludicrous and melancholic video *Future days* combines elements of animation with images shot on the Swedish island of Gotland. The artist created a fictitious 'afterworld for artists' where artists from different generations meet after death. They include key figures from the twentieth-century art world (i.e. Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske, Bas Jan Ader) and a number of forgotten Polish artists and theoreticians (Włodzimierz Borowski, Jerzy Ludwiński). The actors wear masks in the likeness of their characters; their dialogues are based on quotes by the figures they play. The encounter in the phantasmal landscape is followed by the discussions exploring the human desire for the sublime and the lack of art's influence on social matters.



WATERY RHYMES

2014, HD-video, 4 min. 02 sec.

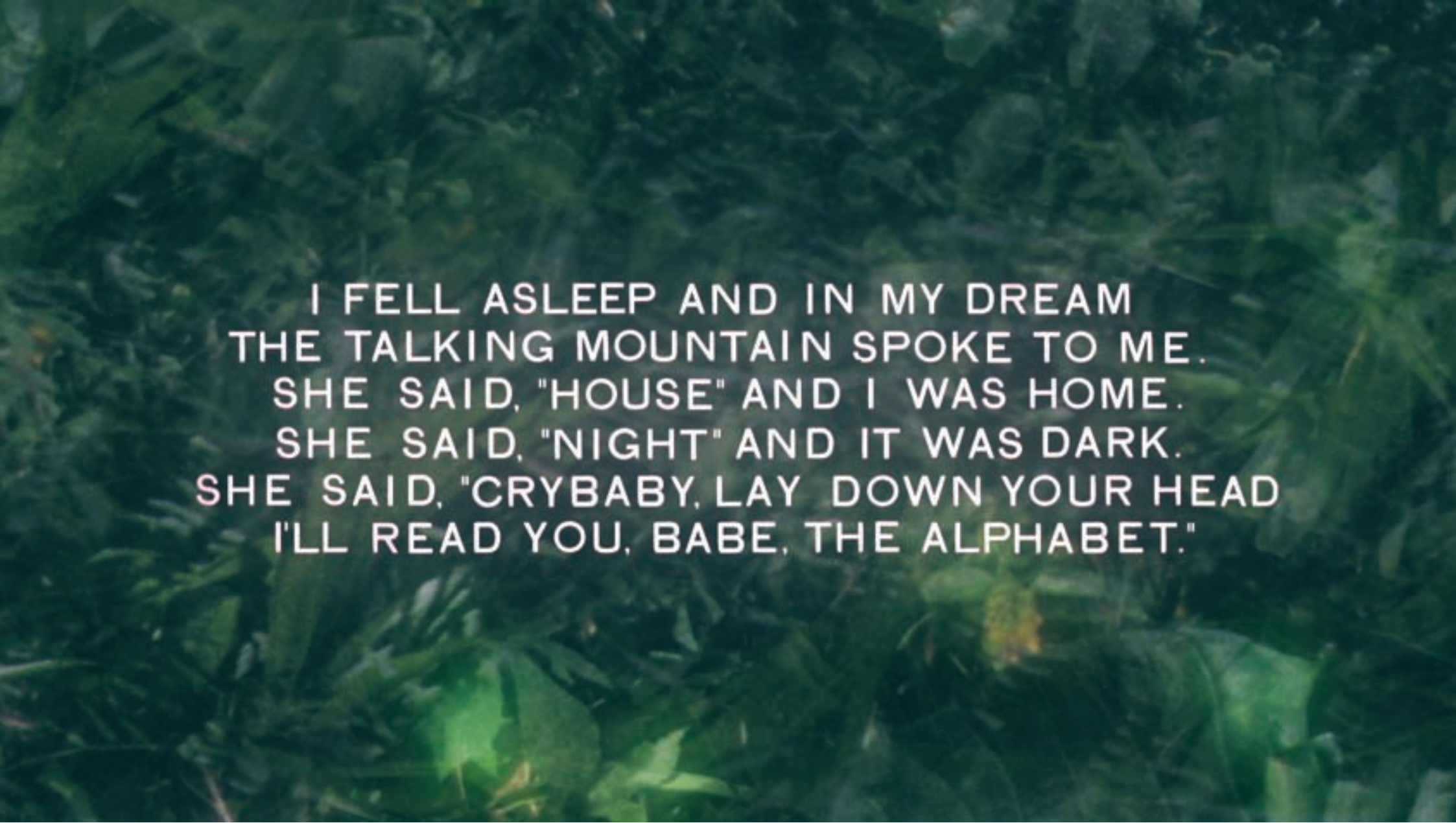
Watery Rhymes, with music written especially by the American musician Sun Araw, presents a poetic vision of language being driven by the same forces and rules as physics. Just like the particles of matter, verbs, nouns and adjectives, floating in the colourful liquid follow the laws of quantum mechanics. This video presents the Universe as a space limited to what can be described in words.



I AM THE MOUTH

2014, HD-video, 5 min. 45 sec.

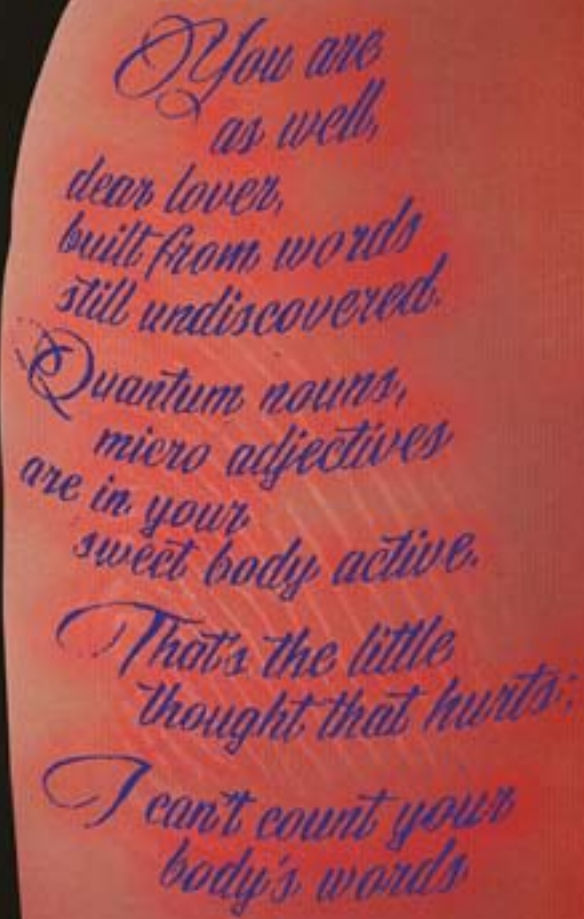
In the video *I Am The Mouth*, a big animated mouth describes how the words, in the form of sound waves, are finding their way through various materials, including the body of the listener. The artificial disembodied mouth, stands for the artist's possibilities of having an influence on her surroundings. In the work that literally "speaks for itself", one can find references to Samuel Beckett's monodrama "Not I", as well as to the internet phenomenon ASMR (videos made with the aim of producing a "bain massage" sensation in the viewer).



I FELL ASLEEP AND IN MY DREAM
THE TALKING MOUNTAIN SPOKE TO ME.
SHE SAID, "HOUSE" AND I WAS HOME.
SHE SAID, "NIGHT" AND IT WAS DARK.
SHE SAID, "CRYBABY, LAY DOWN YOUR HEAD
I'LL READ YOU, BABE, THE ALPHABET."

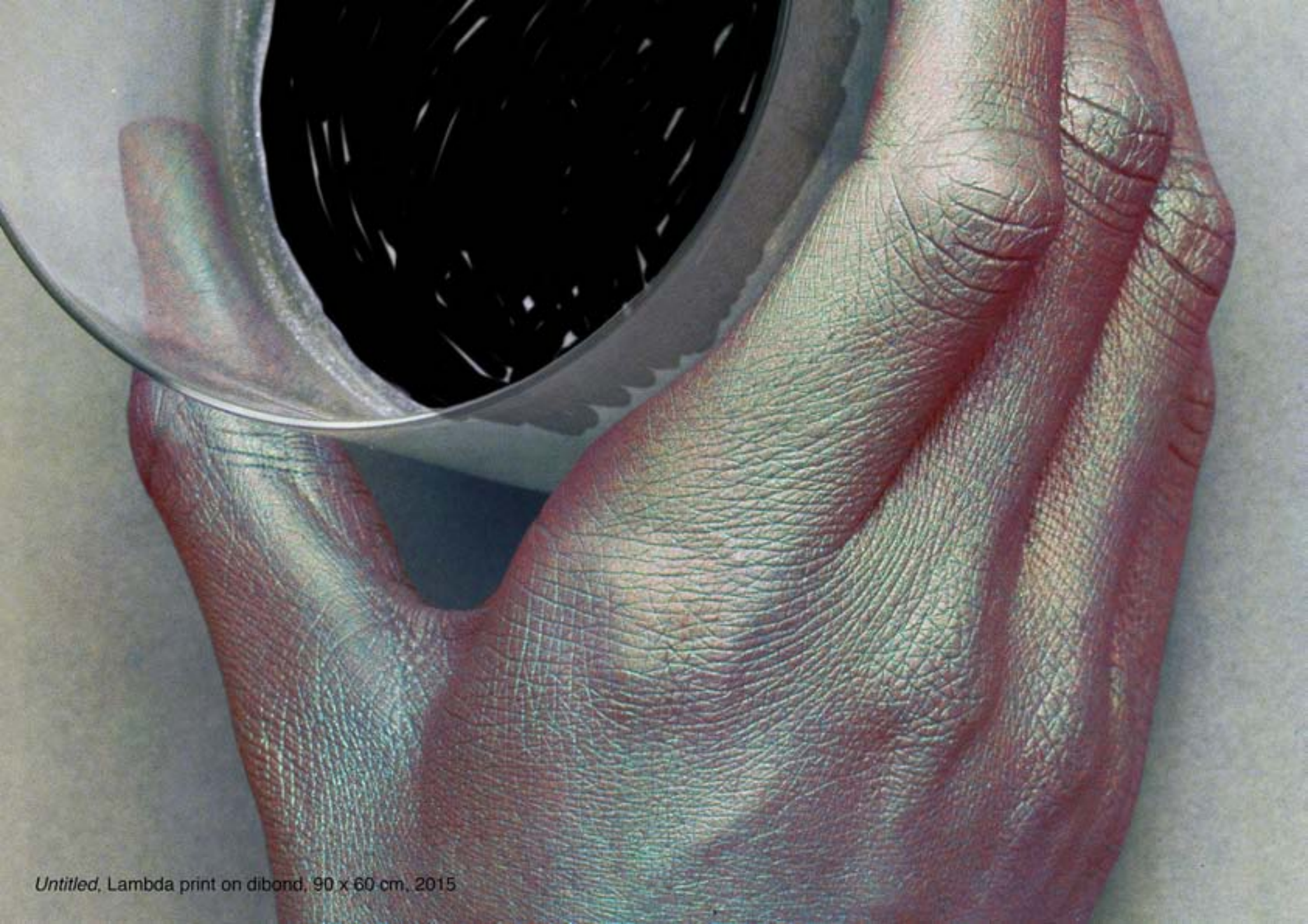
THE TALKING MOUNTAIN
2015, HD-video, 8 min. 40 sec.

The Talking Mountain, a short animated film, describes a journey the artist made with a friend, with the aim of finding The Talking Mountain: a legendary hill able to answer any question. In their dialogue, the ubiquitous travelers focus on a human's need to look for the spiritual essence in inanimate objects, as well as on the notion of name giving as an act of creating reality.



*You are
as well,
dear lover,
built from words
still undiscovered.
Quantum nouns,
micro adjectives
are in your
sweet body active.
That's the little
thought that hurts.
I can't count your
body's words*

Thumb,
Lambda print on dibond, 30 x 40 cm, 2015



Untitled, Lambda print on dibond, 90 x 60 cm, 2015



In the Search of the Talking Mountain,
Ink print on plexi, 70 x 50 cm, 2015

Down is up, Lambda print on dibond, 2013, 30 x 40 cm






Haroun,
Lambda print on dibond, 2012,
60 x 60 cm.



FIVE SHORT FILMS

Five-channel video installation, HD animation, 2012, 3 min. infinite loop.

A video installation consisting of five short animations created as a part of various past film projects, but rejected in the process of final editing.
Installation view: Future Art Generation Art Prize, shortlisted artists' exhibition; Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev.

The image features two large, overlapping spheres of a deep red or orange-red color. They are positioned vertically, with the top sphere partially overlapping the bottom one. The spheres have a slightly grainy or textured appearance. The background is a solid, dark black. In the bottom left corner, there is a line of white text.

The Sun (America), HD, 2012, 3 min. infinite loop

HOW THE WORK IS DONE

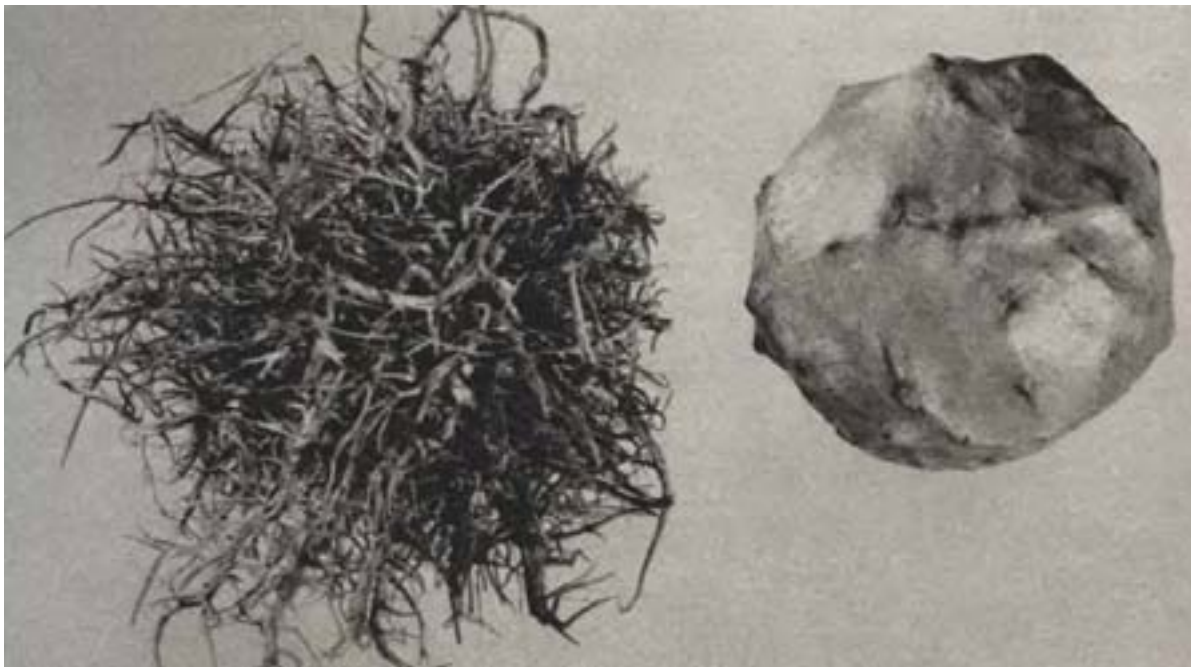
HD 2011, 6 min. 35 sec.

The video 'How the Work is Done' is inspired by the phenomena of artists refraining from work in order to achieve a specific aim. In 1956 students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków started to occupy the workshop of pottery and sculpture. The film stages a hypothetical reconstruction of events, with poorly done puppets serving as the protesters.





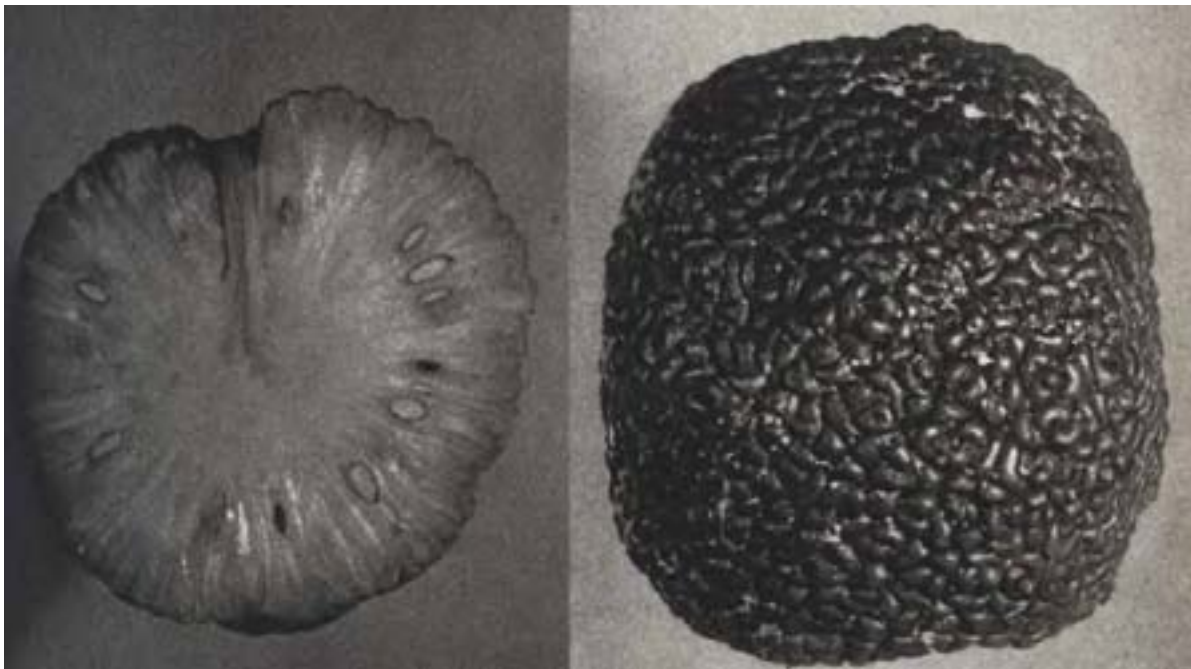
How the Work is Done, HD 2011, 6 min. 35 sec. Exhibition view from Biennale of Sydney, 2014



The Garden

2011, video HD-DVD, 11:08 min

The video *The Garden* refers to Paweł Freisler, a polish artist active mostly in the 1960s and 1970s, who moved to Sweden. In the late 1970s he stopped being active as an artist and started running a garden. Freisler is known mostly for his 'art of story telling' - ephemeral practice which involved the telling of stories about his performances and art objects, impossible to confirm. From this point of view, also his escape from public life and from the participation in the art world can be another story dedicated to create a legend; his 'mystic' garden can be considered as a new scene for his performance. *The Garden* shows a hypothetical visit in his Swedish land, the visit that in fact didn't take place but this is the only solution to preserve the myth.





Arton

2010, photo-collage

The name of the series *Arton*—refers to the work of the polish artist active in the 1960s—Włodzimierz Borowski, who created small organic objects called *Arton*. The project is an attempt to show the mechanisms of remembering the past and creating the history as a collage of thoughts and occurrences that are impossible to verify. The photographs were made as collages composed from the fragments of photos of biological remains and portray sophisticated sculptures made of mud, straws and branches—the probable work of melancholic gardener.

Arton 3, 2010, c-print, 80x50 cm



SENSITIZATION TO COLOUR

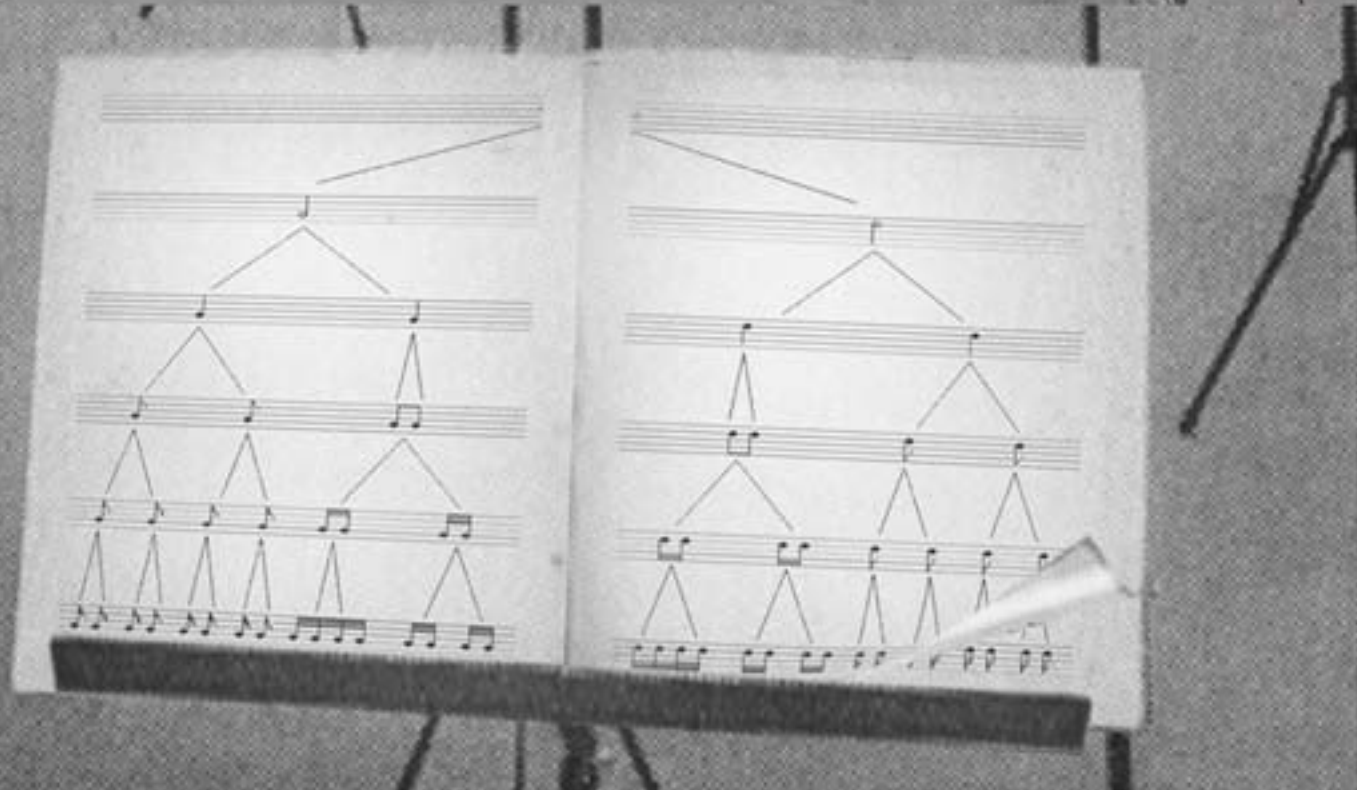
HD 2009, 6 min. 58 sec.

In 'Sensitization to Colour' Polska questions the influence of documentation on the work of art by setting a hypothetical reconstruction of the space in which Polish conceptual artists, Włodzimierz Borowski's performance took place. The space of the event, which took place in 1962 and involved staging many works of Borowski, was described as 'colourful, with neon lights and coloured smoke, but the preserved documentation exists only as a set of black-and-white photographs. In 'Sensitization to Colour' Polska recreated the room on the basis of preserved photographic documentation and descriptions.





Sensitization to Colour, HD 2009, 6 min. 58 sec. (film still)



THE FORGETTING OF PROPER NAMES

HD 2009, 3 min. 45 sec.

Short animated video features works by such artists as Robert Smithson, Rober Morris, Walter de Maria and Wolf Vostell presented as an autonomously developing, active collection. In the essay used in the voice-over Sigmund Freud examines a situation where familiar names are replaced in our memory by 'substitutes' for no reason and cannot be recalled.



Cops and Robbers

2009, c-print, series of 11 photos

In the photographic series *Cops and Robbers* the source are images from a guide book of self-defence made for the Polish Milicja – the communistic formation existing instead of the police, known for many violent acts. The book was printed in 1956, the year of the workers' protests in Poznan – which were the first of the uprisings of the Polish people against the communistic republic of Poland. The original photographs show militiaman fighting with 'the hooligan', who can be also considered as the member of the opposition. The poses of the fighters has been transfigured within computer manipulation – on most of the photos the figures of the militiamen and his adversary has been joined into one person. This gives to the photographed people comic and weird look of the strange dancers. The series shows the impossibility of reading the past and the failure of any attempt to judge the past generations.

Cops and Robbers 8, 2009, c-print, 38x30 cm



Selected exhibition views



The New Sun

Exhibition view at Hamburger Bahnhof, 2017

Starring the little Sun, the video presents the idea of the „helpless observer“, a witness flooded with information who is unable to react. This character is a child-like Sun, observing Earth from a distance, horrified by the course of events unfolding before its eyes. An obvious reference to the figure of a power-deprived witness can be Walter Benjamin's famous Angelos Novus, the angel of History – a mute observer of the crumbling ruins of the past, pushed by the wind into an unknown future.



Sensitization to Colour

Exhibition view at the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017

In 1968 in Poznan, Włodzimierz Borowski, a Polish avant-garde artist, performed his action *Sensitization to Colour*. The performance, painterly and colourful, was documented in black and white photographs, which Agnieszka Polska used as a basis to rebuild the space in which it was originally enacted using materials only in greyscale. The film, which can be taken as a commentary on the process of understanding art from the past, shows a new space for the performance, one that has been abandoned by the artist and all viewers.



Future Days

Exhibition view at Kunshalle Mainz, 2017

The ludicrous and melancholic video *Future Days* combines elements of animation with images shot on the Swedish island of Gotland. The artist created a fictitious 'afterworld for artists' where artists from different generations meet after death. They include key figures from the twentieth century art world (Le. Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske, Bas Jan Adar) and a number of forgotten Polish artists and theoreticians (Włodzimierz Borowski, Jerzy Ludwinski). The actors wear masks in the likeness of their characters and their dialogues are based on quotes by the figures they play. The encounter in the phantasmal landscape is followed by the discussions exploring the human desire for the sublime

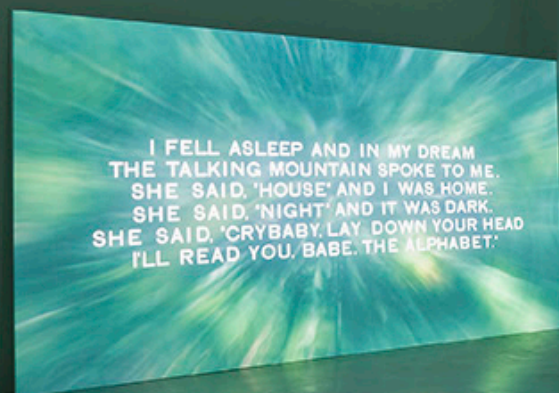


Suspended Animation

Exhibition view at Hirschhorn Museum, 2016

The Bearer of Bad News, 2015, video and sound installation, 9 min. 50 sec
Exhibition view at Rijksakademie, (with sculptures by Olivia Dunbar)





The Body of Words

Exhibition view at ŽAK | BRANICKA, 2015

photo: Marcus Schneider



UNCOMFORTABLE
SHEPHERDS
THESE
GARMENT



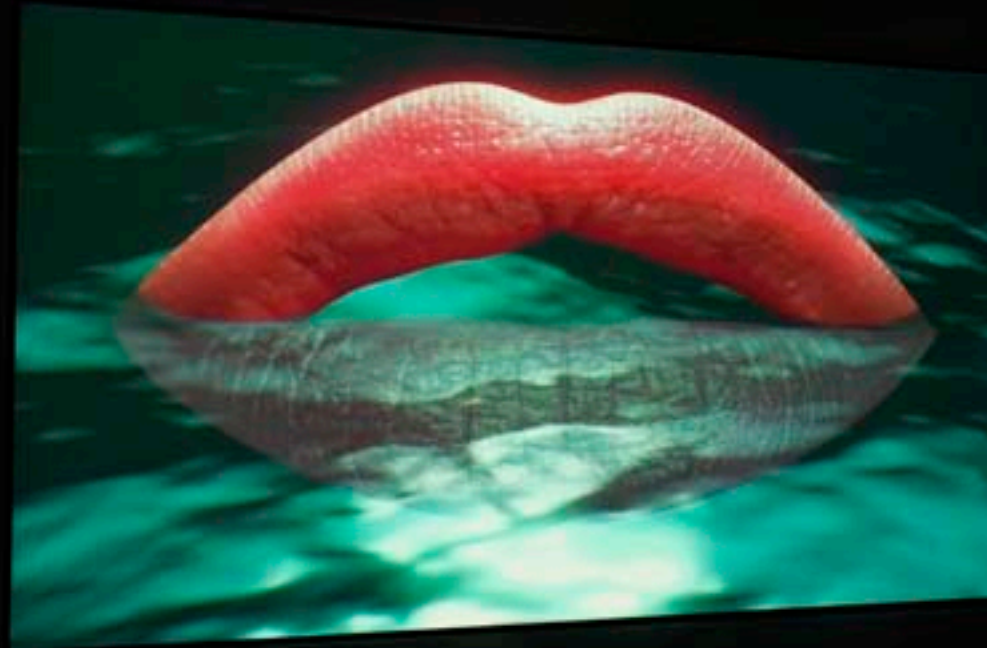


Undiscovered Words

Exhibition view at High Line Channel 14, 2015

photo: Timothy Schenk

courtesy, Friends of the High Line



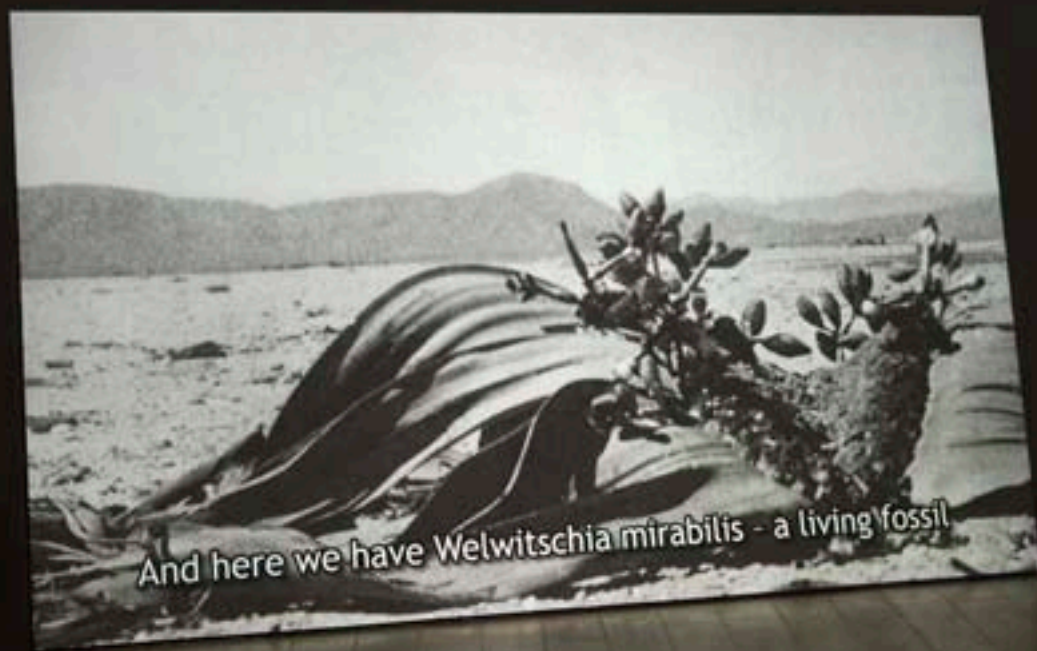
I Am The Mouth

Exhibition view at Nottingham Contemporary, 2014

In *I am the Mouth* the subliminal influence of the artist is implied through the effect of the hypnotic waves and whispering mouth on the unconscious. The mouth guides the viewer through the art work by explaining the mechanisms of speech and the physiological effect of sound. *I am the Mouth II* illustrates the complexity of Polska's practice. It questions both its own mode of production and how an artist "transmits" understanding to an audience. Her work also asks wider questions about how art history is shaped, how we experience art in relation to our understanding of the world, and how these questions fuel the production of art itself. The pace and hypnotic quality of Polska's work is inspired by ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos – a cult internet phenomenon. Polska invites viewers to have a similarly meditative, immersive response to her work.







And here we have *Welwitschia mirabilis* - a living fossil



The Forgetting of Proper Names

Exhibition view at the 19th Sidney Biennale (2014)

photo: Sebastian Kriete

The video, *The Forgetting of Proper Names*, is based on Sigmund Freud's essay of the same title. Excerpted segments of the essay are used as a voice-over for the animation created from photographs of happenings and performances of minimal and conceptual art from the fifties and sixties. The objects, deprived of their primary context, lose the function they were meant to perform and finally are grouped as an absurd collection devoid of meaning.



How the Work is Done

Exhibition view at the 19th Sidney Biennale (2014)

photo: Sebastian Kriete

The video *How the Work is Done* is a quasi documentary referring to a real event from 1956. It began with a group of fine art students from the Academy in Cracow who due to the political waves, chose to close themselves in the sculpture-ceramic studio thus beginning the strike. Amongst the ceramic ovens, tools and unfinished sculptures these students abandoned their work and staged an unofficial strike. During that time they spent living and sleeping in make shift beds, they dreamed of creative work as if it was arduous physical labor. This video questions the social and political effectiveness of artistic activities and what is the social meaning which can be extracted from the experience of doing.



How the Work Is Done, 2011

Presentation at Art Basel Statements, 2011



The Gardener's Responsibility

Exhibition view, 2011

Georg Kargl Box, Vienna, © photo Lisa Rastl, courtesy Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna



Decades

Exhibition view, 2010

ŽAK | BRANICKA, Berlin, 2010 | Kunstmuseum Dieselkraftwerk Cottbus, 2010, © Thomas Kläber

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